**For Release Wednesday, August 19, 2020**

 **Capitol View**

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**No Big Red Football or Volleyball or Other Fall Sports, Say It Isn’t So!**

No Big Red!

Just when you thought 2020 couldn't get any worse. Just when you wondered if the pandemic was going to end. THIS! The Big 10 announces no cross-country, no soccer, no volleyball, NO FOOTBALL.

For the first time in decades, NO Big Red! The horror. Since 1890, University of Nebraska football has been the glue that holds Nebraska together. What about the longest sellout streak in the nation, 375 games dating back to 1962?

There will be no Herbie Husker, Lil’ Red, scores of red balloons floating skyward when the home team scores on game days (and nights) in Lincoln. No packed bars and restaurants and gift shops and hotels and motels.

After days of speculation, rumors and fake news, The Big Ten confirmed August 11 that it is postponing all fall sports, including football. The league said in a statement that moving football or other fall sports to the spring remains "a possibility."
 "When you look at this decision, we just believe collectively that there's too much uncertainty at this point in time in our country to encourage our student-athletes to participate in fall sports," Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren said during an interview after the announcement.

The Big Ten Council of Presidents and Chancellors had a meeting earlier in the day, which appears to have led to the final call.

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“The mental and physical health and welfare of our student-athletes has been at the center of every decision we have made regarding the ability to proceed forward,” Warren said. “As time progressed and after hours of discussion with our Big Ten Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases and the Big Ten Sports Medicine Committee, it became abundantly clear that there was too much uncertainty regarding potential medical risks to allow our student-athletes to compete this fall.”

Nebraska leadership took a strong stance against the decision in a statement on behalf of Head Football Coach Scott Frost, UNL Chancellor Ronnie Green, athletic director Bill Moos and NU President Ted Carter. The statement said, in part:

“We are very disappointed in the decision by the Big Ten Conference to postpone the fall football season, as we have been and continue to be ready to play. Safety comes first. Based on the conversations with our medical experts, we continue to strongly believe the absolute safest place for our student athletes is within the rigorous safety protocols, testing procedures, and the structure and support provided by Husker Athletics.
 "We will continue to consult with medical experts and evaluate the situation as it emerges. We hope it may be possible for our student athletes to have the opportunity to compete.”

So, emotion aside now folks, let’s look at the economic impact of all this. One Lincoln bar owner, Eric Marsh, told the Lincoln Journal Star that he and other bar and restaurant owners “live for those seven Saturdays a year.” He said his revenue on home game Saturdays is about 50 times more than an average weekday. "It's the money that allows us to make it through the rest of the year.”

Frost has said the NU athletic department would lose as much as $120 million in revenue if there was no football season. A 2014 study done by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Bureau of Business Research found Nebraska

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athletics, as a whole, had a $245.5 million economic impact on the city, supporting more than 3,400 jobs and $87 million in worker income. The numbers for football alone (based on eight home games, plus the Spring Game) were $44.8 million in spending outside the stadium, supporting $14.8 million in wages.

Based on that study, each home football game sends an estimated $260,000 in tax revenue to the city, Lincoln City Finance Director Brandon Kauffman said. That includes sales and gas tax, and other funds.

Apparently the only thing to cross the goal line in Lincoln this year was a heavily amended bill (LB1107) that creates a new property tax relief plan, enacts a new business development tax incentives program and provides a pledge of $300 million in future state appropriations to help fund a proposed $2.6 billion mega-project at the UNMC campus in Omaha. That project is built around the Medical Center's effort to win federal designation as the site for development of a new national pandemic and all-hazard disaster response center to serve both civilian and military needs.

Property tax relief under the measure would begin with $125 million in state funding rising to $375 million in five years, all in addition to the $275 million already provided through the state's property tax credit fund. Fiscal analysts have cautioned that the bill will wind up costing too much in the post pandemic economy.

I would have given better odds to Nebraska winning a national championship than this bill passing. But, if the pandemic and its social distancing and facemasks and quarantines have taught us anything, it’s how to wait. I’m just waiting for the other shoe to drop.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for 20 years.*